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From Intelligence Estimates to Daily Newsletters

The work of different U.S. intelligence agencies defies quick summary.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) does intelligence work for the entire government, first and foremost for the White House.

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), which has a relatively small budget (about $565 million compared to the CIA's $3.5 billion), is supposed to be the Pentagon's premier intelligence agency, reporting to the secretary of defense through the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But in practice it is outnumbered, outspent and often overwhelmed by the military intelligence services.

The two agencies, and others such as the National Security Agency (NSA), collaborate on national intelligence estimates (NIEs) about such issues as Soviet strategic forces, with disagreements winding up as footnotes. Where there are differences, it is usually the DIA that takes the darker view. The DIA also produces defense intelligence estimates, paralleling the NIEs.

Daily newsletters are another big item. The CIA produces the highly sensitive President's Daily Brief, which also goes to the secretaries of defense and state. The DIA churns out a daily called Defense Intelligence Digest for readers in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill. The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research serves up the Morning Summary each day for the secretary of state and top deputies.

In addition, as Jeffrey Richelson, author of "The U.S. Intelligence Community," has pointed out, each military service has myriad intelligence components, including at least one scientific and technical intelligence center offering a variety of publications.

The Air Force's Foreign Technology Division prints a classified weekly bulletin with articles such as "Further Data on the Soviet 270-Liter Cold Cathode Electric Discharge Laser." The Army's Foreign Science Technology Center comes out with studies such as "Chemical Warfare Capabilities—Warsaw Pact." The Navy's Technical Intelligence Center prefers such topics as "Communist Military Sealift and Afloat Logistic Support Forces."

Many of the publications put out under DIA's imprimatur are actually the work of the military science and technology centers.

The CIA, and sometimes the military, engages in covert action. The DIA does not.

—George Lardner Jr.